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ABSTRACT

China's opening to the world and economic reform in the late 1970s led to tremendous progress in Chinese education. Social science education, has traditionally assumed the most important task of cultivating responsible citizens. It has undergone remarkable changes in quantity and quality as a result of the change of the social and economic systems, the change in people's perspective of the world around them, the influence of globalization, and the requirement of social adaptability. Social science education curriculum has begun to put great emphasis on cultivating students who are able to adapt to a changing society and able to face challenges in the new century. This paper explores these changes through analysis of some current Chinese social science textbooks at the primary and secondary level. Contains seven references and lists textbooks published between 1980 and 2001. (Author/BT)

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Curriculum Change and Development of Chinese Social Science Education Since 1980s

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Abstract:

Opening to the World and Economic Reform in the late 1970s led to tremendous progress in Chinese education. Social science education, which traditionally assumes the most important task of cultivating responsible citizens, has undergone remarkable changes both in quantity and quality as a result of the change of social and economic system, the change of people's perspective of the world around us, the influence of globalization and the requirement of social adaptability. Social science education curriculum has begun to put great emphasis on cultivating students who are able to fit for changing society and are able to face challenges in the new century. This paper explores these changes through analysis of some current Chinese social science textbooks at primary and secondary level.

Introduction

With the policy of opening to the world and economic reform in the late 1970s, China has experienced tremendous socioeconomic changes. To catch up and compete with the advanced countries, the national goals have shifted profoundly from the traditional goal of moral imperative which emphasizes cooperation, to the economic goal of modernizing China by the year 2000 which emphasizes competition (Tucker and Gilliom, 1984), and then to the general goal of revitalizing China through education, science and technology. Concurrent with the shift of these goals, education policies and practices also change. To respond to the national goal and also to answer the call of Deng Xiaoping that "education must be oriented to the four modernizations, to the world and to the 21st century", since 1980s, Chinese education have undergone a series of reforms led by the State Education Commission (SEC). With it, quite a few important education laws were issued, including

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1. *The Central Government's Decision on Education Reform*. 1985
2. *Compulsory Education Law of People's Republic of China*. 1986
3. *The Outline of Chinese Education Reform and Development*. 1993
4. *Basic Education Reform toward 21st Century: Quality Education*. 1998
5. *Decision on Deepening the Educational Reform and Improving Quality Education in All-Round Way*. 1999
6. *The Action Plan to Revitalize the Education towards the 21st Century*. 1999

Most noticeably, since 1996, quality education has been proposed and become the most important part of Chinese educational reform, aiming to cultivate all-round well-developed citizens who are more creative, independent and capable of dealing with challenges in this increasingly competitive world. This educational reform, as the resumption of university matriculation exam in 1977, has triggered a great change in education arena and will continue to generate radical reforms in many other aspects of society and impact the nation's economic growth and competitive competence.

Needless to say, the new education laws and documents continue to endorse the long-standing political task of education to preserve the political ideologies of Marxism-Lennism, Mao Zedong's Thought, Deng Xiaoping's Theory, Jiang Zheming's "Three Representatives" as well as construction of socialism as the basic principles for the development of socialist education in China (Lin, Jing, 1993), but the focus of these documents have been on the cultivation of young citizens who are productive, competitive, creative and competent. As the Guidelines for Chinese Educational Development mandates:

> *Education must serve the needs of socialist modernization, must be integrated with productive labor and must train morally, intellectually and physically well-developed builders and successors with holy ideals, high morality, broad knowledge and self-discipline.*

In schools, various new educational values and practices are replacing those that are no longer consistent with the new ones arising from the market reform and world development. And as always, the political task, the new education ideas and new values are reflected most obviously in school curriculum, especially in social science curriculum.

Curriculum Change and Socialization in China

Chinese educational system, the largest in the world, plays the most role in the Chinese socialization process ever since the founding of New China. Curriculum, which is compiled by the State Education Commission (used to be the Ministry of Education), especially that for the social sciences, has always been a major tool of this socialization, and has had profound influence on the formation of students' view toward life, people, society and the world. This curriculum is highly centralized and has continued for half a century. The advantage of this unified curriculum is that it helps effectively implement top-down policies and reforms concerning education.

Since 1980s, the national school curriculum has been revised four times, first in 1981, second in 1988, third in 1993 and now the fourth revision is under way, starting in 1999 and is expecting to finish by 2003. All these revisions are responses to the specific need of politics and society. As in other cultures, curriculum change was deep situated in the Chinese social, political, and historical context. This series of revision of national curriculum was born in this changing period of politics, economics and culture, intended to meet the needs of economic reform and increasingly globalization.

Various changes in Chinese society since 1980s are reflected in the school curriculum. As usual, politics still determine the goals and purposes of school curriculum, and the political ideologies are still integrated in all the disciplines in schools, especially in social sciences, but we do notice a lot of changes occur in social sciences, which used to be a dominant tool of socialization expounding political ideas but now focus more on cultivating students' ability to adapt to society.

Social Science Education in China Today

Socialization through curriculum is evident in social science courses, which traditionally include language arts, political science and history required for all Chinese students at various levels. For a long time, these courses have strong sense of political propaganda and invariably indoctrinate the Marxist worldview.

Since educational reform in 1980s, more social science courses have been added that include moral education and social studies at primary schools, citizenship education, political

ideology, social history, common knowledge of socialist construction at secondary schools, western culture and society, western politics and philosophy at higher institutions.

No doubt, adding these courses is a result of the change of social and economic system, the change of people, especially educators' perspective of the world around us, the influence of globalization and the requirement of social adaptability. These courses, of course, continue to expect students "to follow given rules and regulations, to obey the laws, to maintain social stability, and to acquire attitudes and behaviors complementary to changes in the political system" (Jin Ling, 1991, p. 3), but for the first time, they begin to promote individual student's healthy development both physically and psychologically, to cultivate students who are more able to fit for changing society and are able to face challenges in the new century. And also, for the first time, the educational goal begins to focus more on producing citizens that are more initiative, more competitive and more concerned with the nation's scientific and economic prosperity and protection of environment. As expressed in Opinions of the Central Committee of Chinese Communist Party regarding the Further Strengthening and Improvement of Moral Education Work in Schools 1994 "We must conduct education in personal attributes consistent with the development of the times, with social progress, and with the new requirements and urgent needs that have merged during the establishment of the socialist market economy. We must attend to cultivating students in the spirit of initiative, self-reliance, and painstaking pioneering."(1994, p. 94)

This paper explores these changes through analysis of some current Chinese social sciences textbooks at primary and secondary levels. Content analysis is used to describe the changes of the new values and ideas taught in schools since 1980s, because "Textbooks bear a strong imprint of the political cultures of the societies producing them" and "they form an integral and important aspect of educating the young, providing them with values fundamental to the society's political structures and cultures" (Julia Kwong, 1985, p. 197).

Changes in Social Science Textbooks

- Language Arts

Language arts is one of the three most important courses in China, the other two are mathematics and politics, with English becoming equally important in recent years. It has always assumed the

dual task of teaching new words and teaching culture, habits, political values and beliefs through stories, poems, fables, pictures and the like (Jing Lin, 1993; Tucker & Gilliom, 1984; Julia Kwong, 1985). Jin Ling's investigation (1993) shows that compared with those before 1980s, contents in language arts are less politically oriented and "values taught tends to be more tolerant and neutral"(p. 12) in 1980s. This is true. Compared with the strong tone of political propaganda which emphasized class struggle and godly worship to top political leaders, contents in Chinese language arts in 1980s have deserted the notion of class struggle and included many articles praising common people, especially scientists, who are hard-working, who love the country and are persistently pursuing knowledge even in unfavorable circumstances. Given the specific situation in the early 1980s when China just recovered from ten-year turmoil, started to reform its economic system and attempted to revitalize China through scientific knowledge, this change is reasonable and understandably reflected in the curriculum. As the buzzword in 1980s "knowledge is power" indicates, intellectuals who used to be despised and persecuted during the Cultural Revolution were given very positive and encouraging portray in the textbooks in 1980s.

More than ten years of economic reform has greatly spurred economic growth and people's living standard. With it there came more contents in language arts in 1990s that reflect the changes brought about by the economic reform in urban and rural areas, and in ordinary people's daily life. There are more articles describing how an individual bravely and intelligently handled difficult situations, and how goal setting and perseverance helped one succeed. Most noticeably, there have appeared more articles expounding morality. Morality has always been an important theme in language arts, but a close examination of the language arts textbook published in 1990s shows that morality has been given much more emphasis. One-child policy, exam-oriented educational system and whole society's pursuit of economic success have led to widespread moral decline among the youth and students' one-sided development. This is the primary reason that morality has been given new emphasis. In fact, quality education, now the most important educational reform, is to strengthen moral education at all levels and attach great importance to activation of creative awareness and cultivation of overall competence of students. Contents reflecting these ideas have largely appeared in textbooks published before 1999 and there is actually more contents reflecting these thoughts and this educational trend in the new textbooks issued this fall (2002).

Generally speaking, in language arts, the "five love" (love of the motherland, the people, labor, science, and socialism) are dominant themes, but contents are much less of political sense.

They are more reflecting changes generated by the economic reform in all walks of life, and starting to pay attention to the development of students' character, creativity and overall competence.

- Political Science

As is known, in China, political study is required of all students, from primary to secondary, from undergraduates to graduates, and it is tested of all students at all levels. The political science courses include Ideology and Politics, Marxist Philosophy, Political Economy, the History of the Chinese Communist Party, the History of World Communist Movement and Social Development History, the purpose of which is to espouse Marxist/communist/socialist ideology and to develop in students desirable attitudes and behaviors necessary for the stability of the government, the security and prosperity of the country. These political ideas are still prominent there, but changes do occur in some of these courses.

Take Ideology and Politics as an example. Surprisingly different from our common sense of its political orientation and political statement, this course offered to secondary school deals exclusively with students' healthy development both physically and psychologically. The content of this subject is listed below:

Content for Ideology and Politics (Seventh Grade)

Chapter 1: Right Perception of Oneself • Individual is a member of society • Society influences the development of individual • Know more about yourself • Be a person useful to society
Chapter 2: Healthy Psychology • What is healthy psychology • Positive and negative effects • Cultivate good psychology quality
Chapter 3: Learn to adjust your emotion • Negative and positive emotion and its impact on your life • Train and keep good disposition

Chapter 4: Build up a strong will • Will---source of strength • Display of strong will • Will---sword of success • Learn to build up a strong will
Chapter 5: Learn to face Challenges • Challenges are inevitable in life • Ability to face challenge • Adversity nourishes success • Deal with setbacks with positive attitude
Chapter 6: Be pioneer and creator • Initiative---precious gift • Road to success • Sources of being pioneer and creator (holy pursuit, interest, enthusiasm, competitive spirit, dare to run risk) • Be a person of initiative mind and struggling spirit

A glimpse of the content tells us that development of students' psychological health and the spirit of struggle and success has replaced the long-standing political indoctrination. A lot of role models are given to illustrate how one should face challenges, persevere and succeed. We could say that this big change really results from the urgent need of the nation's social economic reform, from the urgent demand of more competitive and constructive talents, and from the increasing influence of globalization.

Social Studies and Moral Education

Unlike social studies in the U.S., which covers such a wide range of disciplines as history, sociology, anthropology, political science, geography, psychology, economics, religion, social studies in China traditionally include history and geography. While history serves as the main channel to inculcate patriotism and provides a historic overview of human society from Marxist perspective, geography generally focuses on geographic and demographic features of China and other countries. Quite often, before 1980s, the contents tended to present a quite negative image of

capitalist countries, attacking the economic and political system in these countries rather than describing historical or geographic facts. In both of these two courses, ideological orientation was straightforward.

A careful examination of history and geography textbooks published in the late 1980s, especially in 1990s, shows that history is still taught in Marxist framework, but geography is a lot different. There's no longer naïve negative portray of capitalist countries, but much neutral presentation of geographic features, economic resources and economic development. There are more contents dealing with how geographic features influence human development and different culture, how relationship between human and environment works on economic development, and how the world becomes more interdependent. It is obvious that the notion of environment protection begins to penetrate the textbook. This remarkable change, no doubt, comes from the realization that China can not keep sustainable without solving the serious environmental problem brought about by excessive economic development since 1980s, and that China must deal with and cooperate with the rest of the world.

Perhaps the greatest change is brought about by the introduction of a new course "Society" or "Social Studies" into primary schools in 1993, and it is a very important course during the nine-year compulsory education. The objectives and requirements for introduction of this course is to ensure that students have a rudimentary understanding of the common phenomena in society, that students have a general knowledge of all aspects of social life so that they could improve their abilities and skills to adapt to the fast changing social life. The following is the content of social studies in China from grade four to grade six:

Content of Elementary Social Studies in China

Grade 4

Family—our family, be a little master of the family, safety at home, family and neighbors, family and society, self-protection
School life-- our school, the way to school, our class, school environment, school and family and society
Life around us—neighborhood, different social life environment, social changes around us
Business and life—business and our life, various markets, learn to shop, sellers and buyers
Industry and life—industry and our daily life, various factories and productions
Agriculture and life—agriculture and our life, produce, source of grains, agricultural development, reform in the countryside
Transportation and life, communication and life
Saving and insurance
Traditional holidays and cultural life

Grade 5

Chinese culture and heritage Brief **history** of our hometown and China, **physical features** of our hometown and China, local famous figures, **famous people** in many fields, **historical events** Political **administration, minorities, national condition, basic laws and national policy**

Grade 6

Our World—different nations, languages and people **Ancient civilizations**—Egypt, India and Babylon Industry Revolution **Continuing development** of Science and Technology **The Changing World**—founders of communism: Marx and Engels WWII **The UN and the Olympic Games** **People's life in different parts of the world**—Japan, Southeast Asia, Arabian countries, Africa, West Europe, Russia, the United States, Latin America, Australia, the Arctic and the Antarctic **Love the Earth**—our shared homeland Environment Protection

For a long time, contents in almost all the Chinese textbooks have been far away from students' environment, from their life. Social Studies really gives students opportunity to know more about people around them, their communities and get them more prepared for their future life. Compared with the long-standing boring and empty political preaching, this new course provides students with quite a number of student-life-related activities. This is really a great progress.

Moral education, added to social science courses in the early 1980s, has been officially one of the most important courses, though less regarded by students and teachers in practice. While moral education in the early and mid 1980s emphasized more on patriotism, i.e., the love of the party leaders and socialism, in a word, still political and ideological education, the 1990s moral education covers more tasks and focuses more on how to foster students' character which will prepare them to better deal with people, their community and society. It usually includes political, ideological, moral and psychological quality education. Its primary task is to develop the students into citizens with sincere love for the motherland, social ethics, civilized behavior and observation of laws. Though a separate course now, moral education in China is, in fact, always deeply integrated into every discipline, almost every pages of social science textbooks. To

accompany the moral education in schools, a series of codes have been issued and pursued, such as "Code of Conduct of Primary School Pupils", "Code of Conduct of Secondary School Students" and the "Norms of Daily Behaviors for Primary School Pupils".

From the above analysis, we can see that curriculum in China, especially social sciences curriculum are concurrent with the shifts in the CPC's ideology and the curriculum changes explicated in social science textbooks are the direct result of social economic changes of China since 1980s, the result of people's new way of looking at and dealing with this changing world, the result of the need to be more adaptive to social life and the globalization. Happy to see, the changes at present in Chinese curriculum are all for the better, and we are confident that more and better changes will be made to cultivate 21st citizens who are more capable of solving personal and social problems, more creative, competitive and cooperative.

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